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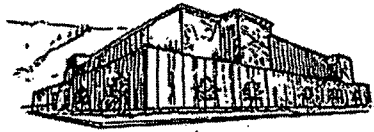
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Framing Christian Environmental Ethics:
Lay Christians' Responses to Creation's Cry

by

Jenny R. Bayn

B. S. , Utah State University, 2003

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

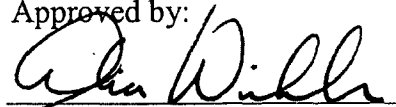
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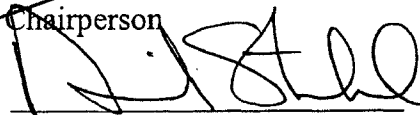
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Cry of Creation to Christian Souls:
Framing Christian Environmental Ethics (66 pp.)

Chairperson: Celia Winkler 

Framing Theory is employed in this paper to explore the ways Christian lay people with environmental ethics have framed their views. The boundaries (barriers) Christians and persons with environmental ethics face to viewing Christianity and environmental ethics within the same frame are discussed as well as the ways Christians with environmental ethics have overcome these barriers. Ideas for how others might do so are presented. The prominent findings of this research are that accepting Christianity or environmental ethics did not inherently lead my participants to accept the other, the strongest barrier for my participants to viewing both in the same frame is the political influence of Western culture, and Christians must be the instigators to help other Christians and people with environmental ethics re-frame Christianity and environmental ethics.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Research Question and Purpose.....	2
Theory.....	2
Environmental Sociology: A Theological Perspective.....	3
Framing Theory.....	3
Frames for Christian Eco-Ethics.....	4
Applying Frames.....	7
Frame Boundaries.....	9
Chapter 2: Methodology.....	11
Research Subjects.....	13
Credibility.....	15
Chapter3: Boundaries.....	17
Boundaries for Christians.....	17
Boundaries for Environmental Ethicists.....	24
Chapter 4: Framing.....	28
Framing Christianity.....	28
Relationship of Faith and Environmental Ethics.....	32
God, Christ, and Nature.....	34

Framing Environmental Ethics.....	37
Re-framing Christianity and Environmental Ethics.....	40
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	44
Appendix 1: Interview Guide.....	47
Appendix 2: Demographic Survey.....	48
Appendix 3: Coding Frame.....	49
References.....	51
Afterward.....	53

Chapter 1: Introduction

An ecosystem can be thought of as a web of interacting bio-diversity. In much the same way, a cultural system is like a web of social, spiritual, and ecological influences. This study examines just two threads in the intricate web we call culture. In modern Western culture the relationship between Christianity and environmental ethics is contested. Depending on whom you ask, what you read, and where you go, you can encounter multiple perspectives on this issue. Some people will look at you with a blank stare and ask if Christians with environmental ethics actually exist. Others will boldly and excitedly proclaim that the two concepts cannot be separated. Christian organizations like the Evangelical Environmental Network, the World Council of Churches and others have started promoting environmental awareness.

Some Christians perceive that humans are intended to dominate the earth regardless of consequences, which is the source of critiques of Judeo-Christian culture based on biblical references such as Genesis 1:28 and 2:15¹, which state, “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground’...The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” However, it can also be argued that human rule over the earth means caring for the earth and being “good stewards” of resources privileged for use.

However, there are many similar environmental and social problems in places

¹ All Biblical References come from the New International Version translation.

such as Asia, which are largely outside of Christian influence. Many scientists and environmental activists wonder why, if Christian doctrine concerns God's creation, Christians have not been the forerunners in environmental movements.

Research Question and Purpose

The purpose of this research is to better understand how Christians and people with environmental ethics communicate and collaborate, which involves understanding how Christians with environmental ethics negotiate meanings about Christianity and environmental ethics, if they communicate or work with other Christians and people with environmental ethics, how they are doing it, and if they are not what barriers prevent them from doing so. In order to understand this I chose to interview Christian lay people with environmental ethics. They offered information about their beliefs and actions regarding Christianity and environmental ethics as well as advice for Christians and people with environmental ethics about how to communicate and collaborate. In this chapter I discuss the theory I used to guide my study.

Theory

Most previous studies on religion and the environment have been based on positivistic theory, which tends to use hypothesis testing to find an ultimate truth or concrete relationship (see Hayes et al., 2001; McMillan et al., 1997; and Wolkamir et al., 1997). My purpose was to discover if a relationship exists between Christianity and environmental ethics rather than just coming up with a hypothesis to test. Thus, I used a critical theory called Framing Theory. Below I will address the historical development of environmental sociological theory, the basis of framing theory, how

Christians use frames, and the boundaries and barriers involved in framing Christian environmental ethics.

Environmental Sociology: A Theological Perspective

Twenty-five years ago there was a shift by a portion of researchers in the field of sociology toward focusing on the interrelation of nature and society, which opposed the classical anti-physical science emphasis in the field. None of the areas in which the bulk of environmental sociology has been done takes a theological approach to studying the environment or nature and yet there are feminist theologians with an emphasis on environmental ethics (Haney, 1998). Therefore, using framing theory to understand environmental ethics from a theological perspective lends to a greater understanding of this issue.

Framing Theory

Due to the nature of environmental issues (e.g. how humans relate to the environment, why, what that means, etc.), both the Social Problems and the Social Movements approaches have been applied in Environmental Sociology. The Social Problems approach focuses on claims, while the Social Movements approach focuses on frames. Claims and frames are both “symbolic challenges to the dominant discourse of society” (McCright et al., 2000, pg. 502). A frame is like a perspective, a larger way of viewing the world. Within a given frame there are various claims.

For example, the way one group of Christians frames the world will determine the claims it makes about it, which could be very different from the way other Christians or people with environmental ethics frame the world. Some Christians believe God created the world for humans, so humans can dominate the world. Other

Christians believe God created the world for which humans have the privileged responsibility of caring. These two views are different frames. Within the first frame, a Christian might claim that humans can use as many natural resources as they want, while in the second frame, they might claim that resources should be used as little as possible. Neither frames nor claims, though, are stagnant. Benford and Snow (2000) define framing as “an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction,” while collective frames are “the outcome of negotiating shared meaning” (pg. 614). Since frames develop through processes of negotiation, I have used this theory to address the issues of negotiating or communicating associated with my research questions.

When Christians frame their beliefs in different ways, their claims can conflict, causing them to act at cross-purposes. This is especially true when a frame does not clearly articulate the relationship between beliefs and actions. For example, Gardner (2003), who researched the involvement of religion in a movement toward a sustainable world, found a lack of understanding among Christians about the outcome of their actions. Many Christians support charitable causes. They donate funds and resources to people in need, which act as temporary solutions to existing social or environmental problems. Meanwhile they can be the same people causing those same problems by supporting (with their consumer dollars) industries that exploit their workers and deplete natural resources.

Frames for Christian Eco-Ethics

Some Christian frames could provide a foundation for Christian environmental ethics. But other Christians may have more difficulty agreeing with a frame involving

environmental ethics. One of the most salient Christian interpretations of an environmental ethic is the concept of stewardship, also known as “earth keeping.” Understanding stewardship from an earth-keeping framework requires an intermediate to a deep environmental ethic (Paterson, 2003). The word “keep” in this interpretation is derived from the Hebrew word *shamar* meaning care. Earth keeping includes the concepts of conservation (management of natural resources to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect), preservation (to protect natural resources or to maintain their state), and restoration (to restore ecosystems as much as possible from the damage caused by humans), which address the often environmentally harmful aspects of consumption as well as production.

Sittler (1954), one of the earliest authors of issues on theology and the environment, supports an earth-keeping ethic stating, “This garden he [a human] is to tend as God’s other creation---not to use as a godless warehouse or to rape as a tyrant” (pg. 18). More recently, this theory has been supported by Jenkins (2003) who argued:

The stunning diversity of creation is not for our eco-touristic entertainment nor to give us building blocks enough to keep us happily constructing our own artifacts; rather, because His [God’s] goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness could be supplied by another (pg. 408).

Earth keeping is also known as stewardship. In his book Earth Community, Earth Ethics (1996), Larry Rasmussen presents a summary of Douglas John Hall’s arguments in The Steward, “If Jesus is dominus (Lord), then the human exercises of power should be patterned on his kind of lordship -- a servant stance in which the last are made first; the weak are made strong, and even the sparrow is cherished, so that all might be gathered into covenantal intimacy on equal terms” (pg. 231). From this he

offers his own definition of a steward: "steward...signals trusteeship...It means wise management of life's household, including knowledge of human limit, together with the rest of nature's" (pg. 92).

Stewardship is a term, symbol, concept etc. that has been used and discussed by many Christians. Douglas John Hall (1990) discussed the symbol of a steward at length in his book.

On the one hand, the steward is singled out for special responsibility. The steward is different. Unlike the other servants, the steward is truly answerable for what happens in the household. All the same, the steward is one of the others, by no means superior to them, having no absolute rights over them, but liable to judgment because of his treatment of them. The steward is different, but the steward is also the same. Like all the others, the steward is recipient of that which can never be his or hers to own (pg. 213).

One of the most significant barriers to using the symbol of stewardship is that within Christendom it has most often been used to refer to the management of finances alone, making it difficult to be viewed as a holistic symbol. Hall (1990) argued,

There is no reason why stewardship should not also have to do with church finances and management. But if it has only to do with these material and self-consciously ecclesiastical matters, then it will not even serve such purposes adequately for very much longer (pg. 15).

Viewing stewardship holistically makes it possible for concerns about a specific aspect to continue. On the flip side, changing Christians' actions first instead of their views could be as effective for incorporating environmental ethics into Christianity. This is known as praxis, which may be defined as, "thought emerging in deed and deed evoking thought" (Hall, 1990, pg. 18). According to praxis thinking, not only do attitudes lead to behaviors, but the reverse applies as well.

Hall suggests Christians need to learn to think corporately. "We need to learn how to teach and preach the gospel and interpret the Christian life as stewardship" (pg.

244). He argues this symbol is effective because, “There is an implicit modesty in it, and this makes it much more compatible with the theology of the cross than many and perhaps most of the concepts by which Christians have defined themselves” (pg. 239). These views show Christianity has been framed in a way that includes environmental ethics, which can be applied in various ways.

Applying Frames

One of the first prominent writers to indicate a problem with applying a Christian frame to environmental ethics was Lynn White (1967). In his thesis, he claims Christianity had formed the culture of the western world, which developed science, technology, and industrial agriculture, ultimately causing the ecological crisis. Thus, he argued the western world should either find a new religion or rethink the old one. Christians who use a framework of earth keeping or stewardship probably already have or could develop an environmental ethic. Thus, the arguments made by White and his supporters may be unnecessary. Nevertheless, White’s thesis has had an extensive impact on the study of Christianity and ecology (see for instance Jenkins, 2003; Carter, 2001; Peterson, 2000; Scott, 2000), which has led scholars and lay people to debate over whether Christianity should be redefined or abandoned. Some, such as Thomas Berry, a Roman Catholic Priest, argue for reform within the Christian tradition. As Berry argues, “We cannot do without traditional religions, but they cannot do what needs to be done. We need a new type of religious orientation” (Peterson, 2000, pg. 251).

In contrast to Berry, some people, for these and many other reasons, have abandoned Christianity altogether. After considering this accusation, those who remain

within the faith who are concerned about the ecological crisis have chosen between three main alternatives.

The first emphasizes an assumed clear distinction between humanity and nature. God has given humanity the right to dominate the rest of creation because it is seen as a separate entity. From this perspective, theology does not need to be understood in any other way (Scott, 2000).

The second emphasizes the inability of the traditional approach of Christian theology to produce a theology for nature and has opted to look for a clearer understanding within existing doctrine that may have previously been misunderstood. Especially active in this realm are feminist theologians and other more liberal Christian sects. For those who look for clearer understanding within Christian doctrine, many Christians and Christian churches have tried to reform their teachings and practice by embracing and emphasizing an ethic of stewardship toward the land. According to Worrell (2000), the concept of stewardship is problematic because it can involve assuming the world is owned by God or by humanity, breeding paternalistic action based on hierarchical domination of people and the earth and eliminating God as directly interacting with nature where stewardship is a duty. Often anthropocentrism (the belief that humans are the most important aspect of the cosmos) underlies the stewardship ethic, a claim that frames the earth as a resource considered wasted if not used (Gowans et al., 2003).

The third is a radical re-working of long accepted basic Christian truths, which has been undertaken by radical feminist theologians, Eco-Feminists, and other radical sects.

Some Christians have managed to intertwine their views of Christianity and environmental ethics. Those who have done so could possess valuable knowledge for other Christians and people with environmental ethics that could be used to increase their communication and collaboration. To understand why Christians and people with environmental ethics have not communicated or worked together more than they have, it is helpful to understand the boundaries they encounter that are associated with their respective frames, which is discussed in the next section on frame boundaries.

Frame Boundaries

A frame can be thought of as looking through a camera. One can only see a certain area through the camera. The edges of the view through the camera represent boundaries. Boundaries are neither good nor bad; they are simply the edge of the frame. If two people are using different frames (looking through different cameras) their boundaries will be different. In some cases they will overlap, while in others they will not. When boundaries do not overlap, they are barriers. When people negotiate their frames, their boundaries can change. Previous barriers can disappear when new boundaries emerge, causing them to overlap with other boundaries. New boundaries, which could be more inclusive of the frame of another group, can come out of the context of and through conflict with the old boundaries (Fuller, 2003). Some Christians have already fused the boundaries around Christianity and environmental ethics and could provide necessary information for others who would try to do so.

Understanding framing theory, claims, boundaries, and barriers in the literature on Christianity and environmental ethics provided a foundation for understanding the

frames, claims, boundaries, barriers, and advice provided by my study. In order to gather the information for my study, though, I had to develop a methodological framework. This is the topic of discussion for the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methods I used for gathering my data, describe my research subjects, and explain why my study is credible. I chose to use qualitative methods as a framework for my study because quantitative studies on religion and environmental attitudes have revealed few correlations. Quantitative studies on environmental attitudes, such as the one by McMillan, Hoban, Clifford, and Brandt, show the way environmental ethics are defined is highly influential in understanding the strength of their correlation to other demographic factors (McMillan et al. 1997). Instead of trying to relate variables used in past research (Wolkamir et al., 1997 and Hayes et al., 2001) such as frequency of prayer, church attendance, denomination, etc., and willingness to recycle, use alternative transportation, and donating to environmental causes that have little or no correlation, I wanted to understand the beliefs, actions, and motives of Christians with environmental ethics.

Many relationships can be quantified and effectively measured. However, attempts to use a positivistic quantitative approach, which assumes there is a solid truth to be discovered and quantified, to understand the relationship between Christianity and environmental attitudes and behaviors have not proven to be very useful, mainly because Christianity is such a broad and difficult term to define, making traditional measures of religiosity ambiguous. For example, quantitative surveys done by Wolkamir et al. (1997) and Hayes et al. (2001) on religiosity and environmentalism have been unsuccessful in finding links between religion and environmental issues. They show that traditional measures of religiosity are not as strong predictors of environmental attitudes and behavior as socio-economic status,

liberalism/conservatism, age and education. A better indicator is interpretation of beliefs and their translation into actions. Tarakeshwar (2001) asserted, "It is more important to look at the specific elements of religious belief and/or participation that contribute to environmental attitudes and behaviors" (pg. 401).

The main method I used was the in-depth interview (IDI). The interview itself consisted of a set of eight questions with probing questions to follow up with when applicable. The format was open, allowing interviewees to use and define their own terms. I used in-depth interviews as a method of gathering data because I wanted Christians with environmental ethics to explain their beliefs, actions, and motives.

The interviews were followed by a short demographic survey (see interview guide and survey in appendix). The survey was used only to monitor the basic characteristics of my subjects in order to ensure that the interview population included a wide variety of demographic characteristics and religious affiliations.

As McMillan et al. (1997) have argued, future research on religion and the environment needs to "further...understand...environmentalism as a concept" (pg. 103), and further studies also need to "test various explanations [of differences in environmental attitudes]" in subcultures (pg. 104). My research forwards the understanding of the beliefs, actions, and motives of lay Christians with environmental ethics. It also furthers the understanding of environmentalism as a concept. My research explains the way my participants frame their Christian faith as well as their environmental ethics. Using IDI's to gain this information was effective because it allowed the participants themselves to define their own terms regarding Christianity and environmental ethics and openly explain what they meant by their definitions.

Lay Christian's interpretations and translations are easy to understand using IDIs, which probe more deeply into meaning and understanding of the way they frame Christianity and environmental ethics. Understanding this topic is aided by IDI's because they are the best method to use to more deeply understand "perceptions of participants or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events" (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, pg. 98). It was also good to use one on one interviews rather than group discussions because it allowed my participants to express themselves freely without concern for what others in the group might think.

Research Subjects

My participants were lay people who defined themselves as Christians with environmental ethics. I focused on lay people to gain an understanding of what they were gaining or not from what they had been taught rather than focusing on leaders, even though leaders could have an impact on a larger group of people.

The stipulation of my research at the master's level was a sample of ten to fifteen participants. This sample size probably did not saturate the study population. However, it does add to general knowledge about Christianity and environmental ethics. There were thirteen participants involved in my study, including seven men and six women from various Christian denominations (LCMS Lutheran, Mormon (Latter Day Saint), United Church of Christ, Roman Catholic, Non-Denominational, Bible-based, and those who chose no denomination or simply defined themselves as Christian). I originally did not want to focus on a specific denomination or definition of Christianity because people within denominations often disagree on various issues that are not directly addressed in church doctrines. Although I knew this would be the

case, I did not know the extent to which it would impact my study. I began to struggle part way through the research because I found my focus shifting to variations in Christianity. This made it much harder to find a consensus of any kind or come to very many conclusions about what could be done to overcome barriers between Christianity and environmental ethics. While I do not feel it would have been appropriate to assign my own personal definition to Christianity on which to base a study, I do think I should have focused a more narrow definition of Christianity if obtaining a more concise conclusion became desirable. I could have obtained a common definition of Christianity shared by a specific group or focused specifically on one denomination. The problem with that is many people who may believe in a given definition of Christianity may not claim any denomination who may share a more similar definition of Christianity. Also, I find it valuable to my own knowledge and to anyone else with a narrow definition of Christianity, to understand there is much variation in definitions of Christianity within our society.

My participants ranged in age from twenty to sixty-seven. They had been Christians from six years to their entire life and had environmental ethics from ten years to their entire life. They held various occupations such as mother, schoolteacher, church worker, editor, and professor, director of an environmental institute, landscape architect, lab technician, and student.

They were from various states throughout the Rocky Mountain West because of the connections I had with Christians with environmental ethics in this region. I used snowball sampling to gather research participants from my few initial contacts. My contacts in Missoula, MT were through the local chapter of Caring for Creation and a

local non-denominational church. The two in Idaho were referred through a Christian camp where I had worked. One young man I worked with was interviewed by phone because he had moved. Two in Utah were from my home church there and the other three in Utah and the one in Colorado were referred by Utah contacts. The interviews took place over a three-month time period during the summer of 2004. I was permitted by my participants to tape-record all the interviews, which were transcribed verbatim to ensure quality. The benefit to having a multi-state approach was that I already had a few contacts in those places. This allowed me to snowball from there. I found that from the contacts I had in Missoula alone the snowball method died out after only a few contacts. If I had stuck strictly with the Missoula area I don't think I would have found even ten contacts. I only knew five of my participants before the study. The ones I knew were likely comfortable sharing their views with me openly. The other contacts they gave also proved to be open since someone they knew well and respected recommended me to them.

Credibility

As a researcher, it is important for me to own my bias. I have a strong background in a conservative Christian denomination through which I learned dedication to studying the Bible. I was also taught by my father to value and respect the natural environment. My background has led me to the interest I have in this topic. It also likely influenced the kinds of questions I asked and how I asked them. However, since I am a Christian and am well versed in biblical references, I am well equipped to understand biblical and Christian references made by my participants. My background in environmental ethics assists in my understanding of them on a

philosophical level. However, my scientific understanding of environmental issues could be considered lacking. My educational background does not include very much emphasis on ecology. Even though I have a strong desire to care for the earth, I often lack the knowledge to put that desire into meaningful practice.

From a critical theory perspective, my study is also credible because the rigorous research method of in-depth interviewing I described above allowed me to gather information that increases consciousness about Christianity and environmental ethics by representing the perspective of a non-prevailing portion of society and identifies potential change-making strategies for Christians and people with environmental ethics (Patton, 2002, pg. 545). In the focus of my study, I also discuss other views of Christianity and environmental ethics than those to which I personally subscribe. Continuing research could interview more lay Christians with environmental ethics in order to obtain saturation. However, due to the size restrictions at the master's level such a goal was beyond the scope of this study. There are weaknesses to this study, such as possible lack of saturation, but it has still added to the general knowledge in the area of religion and the environment. Since my study is so small it simply provides suggestions that could be used to inform other or larger research methods.

Chapter 3: Boundaries

As I explained in the introduction, boundaries are the edge of the frame around the way we view things. If the edges of my frame do not overlap with the edges of someone else's frame, it is going to be much more difficult for us to understand each other and therefore communicate with each other or work together.

My findings revealed the value of understanding the language of my participants. As Rasmussen (1996) wrote,

Learning language is learning culture. Language plays a shaping role in our perception of the world, how we think about it and respond to it. For this reason, learning to perceive, think, and talk differently often leads to acting differently (pg. 32).

Terms like religion, faith, Christianity, environmentalist, liberal, and conservative (just to name a few) are often used casually without an understood shared meaning. In this chapter I discuss the boundaries my participants brought up that Christians and people with environmental ethics have around their frames and how they could inhibit them from communicating and collaborating with one another.

Boundaries for Christians

My participants discussed nine major boundaries inhibiting Christians from adopting environmental ethics. They include: (1) Christian fear of worshiping nature, (2) ignoring the message because of the messenger, (3) focusing on other causes, (4) Christian belief in the apocalypse, (5) disconnection from the natural environment, (6) feeling too comfortable in their present circumstances, (7) perceived environmentalist hypocrisy, (8) sinful human nature, and (9) the influence of politics. In this section I explain what each of these boundaries mean based on the information given by my participants.

The first boundary my participants indicated could inhibit Christians from adopting environmental ethics was Christian fear of worshiping nature. Many of my participants recognized that due to God's first commandment given to Moses on Mt. Sinai as recorded in Exodus 20:3, which states, "You shall have no gods before me," many Christians are careful not to worship anything other than God. Some pagan and indigenous traditions teach that there are spirits or gods within nature. Such traditions can lead some Christians to fear worshiping nature. Thus, caring for the environment can be seen as pagan or idolatry to some Christians. Some of my interview participants had heard criticism about their environmental ethic because of this. For instance, one male participant received criticism from fellow teachers after doing an experiment with students following the earth's pattern of rotation. He stated,

To me, the consistency of it, that every year on the equinox that shadow's gonna be on the same spot, and every year on the winter solstice and the summer solstice that shadow will strike the same spot year after year, that consistency to me...is...awesome! Not like new sneakers are awesome, but like awesome! It really is! If anything, I think that consistency builds my faith. I mean it's amazing to see that shadow roll around and hit the same spot that it did. And so I don't know why people are threatened by that, but they are. And I don't understand why that type of relationship to the earth threatens [Christians].

Another similar command deterring Christians from environmental ethics comes from First John 2:15 which states, "Do not love the world or anything in the world." A male participant referred to this passage along with his interpretation of it. As he put it,

I think that people get confused that Christ may have said something like 'don't love the world'. But I don't think He was talking about the earth and environment. I think He was talking about the world value system.

According to his interpretation, not loving the world means not going along with the values in society that are contrary to biblical teaching, not that we should see no value in and take no care of God's creation.

The second barrier for Christians is ignoring the message that environmental ethics are important because of where they get the information. People can decide they do not like someone and will not listen to them. Some Christians with environmental ethics struggle to share the consistency they see between scripture and environmental ethics with other Christians because they often get tuned out. One male participant said,

What frustrates me is the difficulty people have separating ideas from the people who present them...people tend to reject messages because they don't like the messenger or what they perceive of the messenger...That frustrates me in the case of environmental ethics because I believe that the environmental ethic is very much in tune with what we are told from scripture.

The third barrier raised by my participants was the fact that many Christian churches, denominations, and individuals focus on other causes. Many Christians focus on preaching the gospel to all people more than on anything else due to various commands given in the Bible. Many charity, mission, and service organizations are led by Christians with the purpose of loving, serving, and sharing the gospel with others, with little or no emphasis on addressing environmental problems. One male participant complained,

They [Christians] are focused more on having people acknowledge that Christ is God and the savior of mankind. But also as a secondary aspect...he would have us live in a way that glorifies God, not in a way that glorifies our world value system. I don't think that's incongruous as a Christian and yet it doesn't get a lot of attention because it seems like all the attention is the other way. You know it's family oriented and it's value-based, but it's not, it doesn't readily acknowledge that connection [with environmental ethics].

Not recognizing the connection between caring for others by caring for their environment prevents many Christians from seeing it as an important focus. Grizzle et al. (1998) point out, "By definition, eco-justice is part of evangelism...working to save

our rich natural resources and securing a more just distribution of these resources is a work of evangelism" (pg. 243). This understanding could be used to show Christians how incorporating care for the environment is helping them do precisely what they have set out to do. Also, a world-renowned Christian author, C.S. Lewis, had this to say on the subject: "What we call human power over nature is actually the power exercised by some people over others, using nature as a tool" (Rasmussen, 1996, pg. 42). Human issues and "nature" issues are oftentimes one in the same.

Christian belief in the apocalypse is the fourth boundary that could inhibit Christians from adopting environmental ethics. Some Christians believe the world will end soon, and if it will not end for a long time, God will provide for everyone until then. Based on this view, humans do not need to do anything to take care of the environment or save resources for future generations because they will be provided for no matter what. One male participant stated,

Some people think that we should use it as much as we can, just throw it away because it doesn't matter...the second coming's going to come...eventually anyway so we don't need to worry about it.

Being disconnected from the natural environment is the fifth barrier that can discourage a Christian's willingness to adopt environmental ethics. Encouraging interaction with the environment as well as education about effects of actions is important according to this male participant.

[People] distance themselves from the environment, whether it's living in cities and not knowing what's in their surroundings, what their surroundings are or...just not thinking about the results of their actions, be it driving a car or littering or voting such that the...natural resources may be exploited. I think the more people are in tune with their environment, the more protective they are.

The sixth boundary my participants suggested could inhibit Christians' adopting

environmental ethics was being too comfortable in their present situation. My participants suggested that people who do not have environmental ethics do not feel the need to solve environmental problems because they do not think the problems exist. As one male participant explained,

I think that if people are comfortable where they are they're not going to...investigate conservation issues. And that probably goes for me too, you know, I'm not going to branch out or go any new directions as long as I feel comfortable where I am.

Only one participant brought up the seventh barrier, but it struck me because I have encountered the same thing. Since only one person I interviewed brought up this point, I do wonder if it is even something that has occurred to many other Christians. Finding this out could be a pursuit for future research on this topic. It has to do with alleged hypocritical attitudes of many environmentalists. As this female participant put it,

The environmental movement has been taken over by people who believe in the utter supremacy of human beings, whether they realize it or not. On the one hand they think of humans as just another animal, but on the other hand they think of us as so supreme that we can rule anything, do anything. And there is on the one hand this idea that we're the supreme and on the other hand this idea that we're nothing.

This woman explained she had met some environmental activists that see humans as just another creature that has evolved and so as nothing more or better than any other creature. Therefore, humans do not have more rights or privileges and should certainly not be ruling over everything else. This seemed to her like a very humble, non-anthropocentric point of view. However, she argued that people that make this argument are often the same people who are avidly involved in environmental causes, thinking that human beings still have enough power to solve all the problems they've

caused, which she considered a prideful way of thinking. In this category she only included some extreme environmental activists. Other environmental activists could argue humans should use restraint or set limits upon their impact on the environment, which could still be considered very humble.

The eighth barrier Christians can face when encountering environmental ethics raised by my participants was sinful human nature. They referred to the belief that humans have been sinful since just after the beginning of their existence. Sinful human nature is a biblical concept from Genesis. When Adam and Even were cast out of the Garden of Eden, God told them that they and all their descendants would be punished. Many things relate to humankind's sinful nature such as: materialism, greed, pride, selfishness, wastefulness, and ingratitude. It is important to note that to some Christians, greed is the most important problem, the root of all problems. For some Christians, sin in the world is the whole reason humankind has problems. Therefore, some Christians see sin as a barrier for people with environmental ethics as well as for Christians. One male participant indicated that all humans suffer from the same malady. He stated,

Because of the sinful nature, and we've basically got two world views or world values...In a nut shell I think that the essence of environmental crises comes from the fact that we have a fallen nature and we tend to follow the world view that puts a lot of emphasis in materialism and greed and pride and things like that.

He assumes that all humans have a sinful nature; so environmental crises are the result of not just some people's actions, but the actions of all people. Kaufman (2003) also suggested environmental problems are not exclusive to the Christian community; rather they are an issue all people contribute to. He wrote,

This [the ecological crisis] is not just a specifically Christian or theistic problem; it is a problem in which all humans are implicated, and we are all called to do our part in its solution (pg. 149).

The ninth boundary my participants identified keeping Christians from adopting environmental ethics is the influence of politics. This is especially a problem for more conservative Christians. One male participant expressed his frustration with this boundary, asserting,

Environmental ethics is not inherently a liberal or conservative issue...the word conservation and conservative have the same root...how did we somehow get that, 'You can't be a conservationist and be a conservative'?

One of the most difficult boundaries for Christians with environmental ethics is maintaining consistency. The way they frame their beliefs makes sense to them, but it often does not coincide with patterns in society. This problem can be instigated and encouraged by labels in society, especially political, such as liberal, conservative, Democrat and Republican. Guth et al. (1995) argued politics acts as a significant boundary to environmental ethics for conservative Christians. They wrote,

Studies of religious attitudes suggest that there are more dimensions to conservative Christianity than 'dominion belief' alone. And political conservatism has been associated with less pro-environmental opinions in general (in Boyd, 1999, pg. 37).

One outspoken group of Christians in the United States is conservative Republicans. Haney (1998) emphasizes the work of the Christian Coalition in the Republican Party. This is a prime example of how the schism between Christianity and environmental ethics has been broadened. Positions taken by the party include:

anti-abortion and anti-gay-and lesbian-rights stands, as well as efforts to cut back on welfare funds and to include 'creationism science' in the public schools...Robertson has written: 'There will never be a world peace until God's house and God's people are given their rightful place of leadership at the top of the world (Haney, 1998, pg. 21).

Some traditionally conservative Christians are against abortion and homosexual rights, but they struggle because they support environmental ethics. In their eyes all three of these stances are biblically based. Yet, for many Christians who believe conservatively on other issues, the “liberal” view of environmental ethics gets pushed aside, even if they could see a biblical or spiritual basis for it.

In summary, the most prevalent barriers raised by my participants that re preventing some Christians from adopting environmental ethics are: (1) Christian fear of worshiping nature, (2) ignoring the message because of the messenger, (3) focusing on other causes, (4) Christian belief in the apocalypse, (5) disconnection from the natural environment, (6) feeling too comfortable in their present circumstances, (7) perceived environmentalist hypocrisy, (8) sinful human nature, and (9) the influence of politics. This last boundary, the influence of politics, was the most prevalent among the boundaries my participants discussed. It came up more often than any other. Just as Christians have frame boundaries that can inhibit them from adopting environmental ethics, so people with environmental ethics have frame boundaries that can inhibit them from adopting Christianity. This is the topic of discussion for the next section.

Boundaries for Environmental Ethicists

My participants discussed five major boundaries inhibiting people with environmental ethics from adopting Christianity. My participants argued that three of them were problems environmental ethicists themselves would have with Christianity. They are: (1) Christian belief in dominion, (2) Christian belief that humans are separate from the rest of nature, and (3) Christian hypocrisy. The other two are from a strictly

Christian perspective. They are: (4) sinful nature (discussed in the last section) and (5) viewing the created over the Creator.

The first boundary my participants suggested could prevent people with environmental ethics from adopting Christianity is the Christian belief in dominion when it is understood as domination of the earth. This belief is often associated with a fundamentalist Christian perspective. Many Christian Fundamentalists read the Bible selectively and very literally, especially with regard to extremist views, and believe dominion means domination and ultimate rule over the earth and everything in it. A male participant explained,

Many environmental activists or people who consider themselves environmentalists reject Christianity because they reject the traditional dominion interpretation of scripture.

The reason this particular view may be so much more widespread relative to other interpretations of Christianity could be that Fundamentalist Christians are the most active Christian group in the public eye. A female participant illustrated this point. As she put it,

People who are un-churched tend to view Christianity and Christian as fundamental[ist]. That's...what they tend to think of because fundamentalists have really been out there and they...proselytize, and so they've been very successful in their proselytizing because that's what people think of when you mention being Christian or Christianity.

Several participants suggested a second boundary that keeps people with environmental ethics from adopting Christianity is the Christian belief that humans are separate from nature, which comes from the biblical teaching that humans are the only creatures that have been made in God's image and commanded to rule over and subdue the Earth. This is problematic for environmental ethicists when they view the Earth as

an interdependent whole. It does not make sense to separate humans from the rest of nature if they are interconnected. Some Christians understand the separation between humans and the rest of nature more flexibly. Even though humans are different from the rest of nature, they are still a part of the whole. One female participant light-heartedly stated,

[We're] definitely separate, believing that God created man differently. I guess we're all a part of God's creation, but I definitely don't see it as evolution, us as evolutionary bi-products of nature...I think we're in a different category. No meat bi-products here! (laughs).

The respondents in this study identified Christian hypocrisy as a third barrier preventing people with environmental ethics from adopting Christianity. What they meant by that was that Christians often say they care about God's creation but their actions do not show it. Not only is this a barrier for people with environmental ethics to overcome, it is one for Christians to overcome in their quest to evangelize. One woman participant explained it this way:

But if we trash the earth...these other people aren't gonna see any good in that. They're not going to want to hear about our Jesus if we're trashing the earth.

Another woman's remarks were similar. She said,

I just think it says a lot about Christianity if we put out the message that we believe in God as a creator and believe this [the earth] is His but we don't care about it. I don't know. That just doesn't seem like a very good witness to me. Yea, I can see that turning people off as well to Christianity if there's just absolutely no respect or awareness of the importance of protecting wild areas and good farming practices and stuff.

This barrier is frustrating for some Christians in another way. Many are reading teachings in scripture and seeing lives opposing those teachings lived out in their Christian community. One male participant stated,

I think there's a difference maybe in Christian culture and Christian doctrine.

And I think a lot of Christian culture doesn't have an environmental ethic. But if you look at the core of it, I really believe, like I said before, I don't think there's a separation. I think taking care of the earth is like taking care of our bodies and showing respect to the one who gave us life.

In the previous section, I discussed the fact that Christians often said that the barriers of the sinful nature hold true for non-Christians as well. This would help keep people with environmental ethics from adopting Christianity.

The final barrier raised by my participants was that non-Christians may not recognize a creator of the universe and therefore revere the earth more than God. This phenomenon is not a new one, dating back to biblical times in the days of Paul. One male participant mentioned this stating,

[In] Romans where...Paul indicates that a long time ago...even though God revealed Himself to humans through His creation, people stopped realizing there was a Creator and started worshiping the creation instead of the Creator.

This is a fundamental barrier to adopting Christianity for non-Christians with environmental ethics that do not believe in a creator because then they will not believe in the teachings of Christianity. One thing that has stayed consistent in any definition (I've seen) of Christianity is that there is a God who created the earth in one manner or another.

This chapter examined the perceived boundaries around frames for Christians and people with environmental ethics that my participants indicated would inhibit them from adopting one another's views. In the next chapter I discuss the various ways my participants have framed Christianity and environmental ethics. I also explore how they have fused boundaries around Christianity and environmental ethics and extract lessons of potential use to other Christians seeking to bring environmental ethics into their frames.

Chapter 4: Framing

The boundaries associated with Christianity and environmental ethics are the result of the various ways in which they are framed. In this chapter I discuss the ways my participants frame Christianity and environmental ethics as separate entities and together, as well as their recommendations for other Christians and people with environmental ethics who might try to do the same.

Framing Christianity

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch (Acts 11:25-27).

As I prefaced the question to my participants in their interviews, Christianity has been given many different definitions in modern American society. Thus, I sought to understand how they defined Christianity and how they related that to environmental ethics. As I discussed earlier, the level of this variation was shocking to me and is actually something I would approach very differently in a future study. Eleanor Haney (1998) defines in her own words the basic tenets of any example of Christianity,

Fundamental to any understanding of Christianity are the beliefs that God is good, that God is imaged in Jesus, that God seeks and accomplishes human salvation, and that God endures (pg. 59).

I, too, could come up with a list of commonly held beliefs among all Christians. In my study I found three dominant frames for Christianity. For the sake of discussion, I have labeled them: the “One Way”, the “Example”, and “Non-Exclusive”. Most participants fell directly into one category or another while a few were between categories.

The basic tenet of the “One Way” include a belief that Christ is both God and

man and is the only way to God the Father. According to this perspective, human beings are sinful, but if they have faith in Christ's sacrifice as their savior they will be forgiven and live eternally. Thus, Christianity provides a unique message for these people about life, not only in this world but also in the next. One female participant gave a basic outline of this view. She explained,

[T]o be a Christian means that I believe there's one sovereign God in the universe. He's a triune God composed of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And I believe that God manifested Himself as a human in the form of Jesus Christ who walked on the earth and chose to sacrifice for our sins and in order that we would have eternal life if we choose to believe in Him, have faith and follow Him.

Key to this approach to framing Christianity is that faith in Christ is the only way for humans to be saved from eternal death and suffering. These Christians see no other way for humankind or anything else to gain any good thing. It is considered good to do good works and follow the commandments and example of Christ, but these things can only be done by the power of God.

Those in the "Example" frame view Christ only as partially essential. He was a good example of selflessness and various other attributes for an ideal world. Sharing the message of Christ is not as important as living in accordance with the example Christ modeled and being a model to others. Christ is a mentor and teacher rather than a savior and Lord. A female participant using this frame claimed:

Christianity to me was what I was doing today at the nursing home when the other people didn't show up with the Eucharist, and the little people had gathered in their wheel chairs and I went in and saw the situation and I said, 'Well, we're gonna visit!' And we all sat around a table in wheelchairs, they in theirs, and it was the first time they laughed and told jokes... They need attention. They need somebody to say, 'How many brothers and sisters did you have?' That's Christianity to me. It's caring about your fellow human beings, no matter what.

Again, framers of the “One Way” would not disagree that acts such as these are good things, but the message behind the act is what needs to be emphasized. A critique of the “One Way” by the “Example” is they are too concerned about belief and fail to act, sometimes at all.

My participants in both the “One Way” and “Example” frames struggled specifically with political boundaries to Christians adopting environmental ethics.

One female participant stated,

In our country people are allied with Republican or Democrat and conservative Christians tend to be Republican and Republicans tend to not do a whole lot for the environment.

And another male said,

Mormons have gravitated to the conservative right. And they’ve done that for a variety of purposes but honestly, and it’s more complex than this, but it’s because conservatives are against abortion and so Mormons are conservatives. And conservatives tend to opt for industry over environmental ethics. And because we’re already on this side that’s how we feel about it, and that sucks! That’s not right. And I think that our political system is so messed up and it makes it so that things are black and white and the lines are not blurred at all and everyone is one or the other. And if you’re an independent or if you are a democrat but maybe you’re pro-life people can’t get their heads around that or whatever.

These any many other comments my participants made suggested that politics in American society were the most prevalent barriers to Christians and people with environmental ethics communicating and working together.

Finally, participants in the “Non-Exclusive” frame believe Christ was simply a good man with many good teachings, but he is certainly not the only way for humans to be saved eternal death and receive eternal life. They do not think sharing the message of Christ is important at all. As one female participant expressed,

I don’t know that they (non-Christians with environmental ethics) need

anything. I'm serious. I think their lives are in order spiritually...I don't feel that there's any opposition. There's a difference in knowledge, a difference in experience, in practice. But I don't believe that what they're doing is teaching against Christianity. Certainly not the ones I know.

Many participants using this frame believe the core teachings of Christianity are similar if not the same as the core teachings of many other faiths. They are all simply different paths leading to the same place. Another female participant asserted,

I don't see Christianity as THE religion. I see Christianity as one...manifestation of the need for all humans to...give meaning to our life. And I think that other religions also are valid...and I use other religions also for their wisdom.

Each of the three ways my participants frame Christianity presents a different view of the world. From each of these frames come various claims. Some claims specific to each group have been presented above in this section. Others were more of a consensus across groups. Hall's (1990) discussion of praxis could explain why participants from all three frames reported that they did not gain an active environmental ethic from theological study but rather came to value God's creation through their interaction with it. As some participants mentioned, Hall (1990) described Jesus as an example of the stewardship model. He wrote,

Jesus in fact defines and fulfills the office of the steward. Because He is just...faithful...obedient...not concerned about saving His own life, but lays it down for his friends (pg. 44).

A steward is a manager of something, but not an owner. The steward is under the jurisdiction of the owner to whom they must give answer. Management in this context is not one of selfish rule, but of service to the owner. One male participant defined it this way:

I think we should be more like the steward or someone that God has entrusted with responsibility of taking...proper management of the earth, the resources

that he's given us. We've got everything we need; we just have to use it wisely. I think what I wish other Christians knew or would consider is that I think there is that view as opposed to the exploitive approach that some people seem to have.

Everyone who brought up this issue in the interviews recognized that not all Christians thought this way.

Relationship of Faith and Environmental Ethics

Just as there are various ways people frame their Christian faith, there are various ways they relate their faith to environmental ethics. Though participants claimed to have environmental ethics, the degree to which they related them to their faith widely varied. My participants related their faith to their environmental ethics in three ways. They either had an inseparable, unrelated, and unclear relationship between their faith and their environmental ethics.

An inseparable relationship is one in which a person's faith is related to every aspect of their life. Everything they believe or do is in some way informed by their faith. Many people would acknowledge they do not actually always do what they believe they should because of sin. For instance, one male participant stated very boldly and clearly, "I think that the way I view everything is related in some way to my faith. Because my faith is central to who I am, how I view the world." However, just like the patterns in the way people define Christianity, here, too, some participants could not directly be categorized as having their relationship between their faith and their environmental ethics as inseparable, unrelated or unclear. Some participants were between categories. This same participant indicated many other factors in his life that influenced the way he learned about, thought about, and treated the world. Because of the career as an educator in the field of natural resources he has chosen, his social

surroundings teach, support, and encourage environmental awareness. Still the root of his ethic is his faith and the way it teaches him to relate to the earth. Those in this frame tend to think humans have a special role, to one degree or another, to take care of the earth until it no longer exists. This male participant who has an inseparable relationship between his faith and his environmental ethics agreed stating, “Not because we destroyed it [the earth], but because it was the time that God has chosen [to end the earth].” For some, believing God created all is so strong it instills and strengthens faith in their hearts, like one female participant who said,

You can trust him [Jesus] because of the creation. You see how able he is to fit together everything, at every level.

Opposing her view, some Christians see their faith and their environmental ethics as unrelated. I encountered this sentiment most strongly in one male participant. As he put it,

I can’t say that I attribute my conservation or environmental attitudes to my Christianity. ...I’m not an environmentalist because the Bible tells me to be; I guess is what I’m saying.

Other participants had an unclear relationship between their faith and their environmental ethics. One man referred to this as “a chicken and egg kind of issue”. His ultimate question was, “Do I interpret the Bible in a way that fits my environmental ethic, or does my environmental ethic come from my reading of the Bible?” This was a common question among my participants who said they had an unclear relationship between Christianity and environmental ethics.

Although my participants came to relate Christianity and environmental ethics in different ways, they all came to some of the same conclusions about how to frame Christianity and environmental ethics through the influence of their interpretation of the

Bible about God and Christ and their experiences in nature, which I discuss in the next sub-section.

God, Christ, and Nature

There was a clear consensus among all my participants that God created the world and everything in it. More complicated and interesting were my participant's views on Christ's relationship to nature. A critique of Christianity in relation to environmental ethics is that there are plenty of biblical references to non-human creation, but not much comes out of the New Testament or Christ's teachings on the subject. Thus, I specifically addressed this point with my participants.

One male participant offered an explanation for why the Bible and specifically the New Testament does not offer more direct information regarding how humans should treat the earth. He conceived that in the time the Bible was written they did not have the environmental and social problems we do now because they did not have as large a population nor were they as advanced in technology. They were probably surrounded by nature much more than most people are today. Just as we would not make reference to buildings and cars and other things that seem "everyday" to us, they did not make mention of the way they treated the natural world because it was always around them and seemed very "everyday" to them. Now it must also be acknowledged that there are many references to nature and God's creation in the Bible. However, this man's point was that he thought in our day and age Christians should be putting a strong emphasis on environmental issues through faith, even though many people wonder why environmental issues are not discussed more strongly in scriptural texts.

Two other prevailing views my participants shared regarding Christ's

relationship to nature were His experiences in the wilderness and His role as a servant. Out of the latter came the controversial issue of what dominion over the earth should mean for Christians.

According to my participants, Christ has two kinds of significant experiences in the wilderness. The first they brought up is his temptation by Satan in the desert for forty days. The way this is interpreted in an environmentally conscious context is as such: Jesus is placed in a humbling setting where he must rely on God to provide for him and not selfishly take advantage of his surroundings.

They also recognized Christ's experiences in the wilderness and prayer in solitary places. Since much of Christ's life took place in natural settings and most of his transportation was done on foot, some of my participants mentioned this would be a good example to follow. One male participant commented,

I think a lot of the more spiritual experiences I've had have been times when I've been alone in the mountains. And I think it's obvious in the scriptures too from what I mentioned earlier about the times [Jesus had] spent out in the foothills around Jerusalem.

The second aspect of Christ that relates less directly to the environment, but more effectively when applied is his example as a servant. This man explained what this means to him:

Jesus Christ...and what did he do? He washed the feet of His disciples...He didn't stand around telling them what to do and where to go and say, 'Give me everything you can and when you're used up I'll just sort of put you in a nursing home'...He cared for those people that were his own subjects and I think that that's the model that we should use and that those come directly from scripture.

Jesus as an example of a servant is relevant for an environmental ethic because caring for the environment on which humans depend can be a way to care for humans, something most Christians are concerned about. A few participants explained the way

they see human dominion over the earth as caring for the earth. One female participant explained it this way:

I believe the earth was designed for our pleasure and for us to care-take, although some people like to manipulate the word, you know, you shall have dominion over everything. I think God meant for us to have dominion like, everything else, have dominion like care for what I have just given you and put all my creative energy into making.

As this participant mentions, many people have interpreted dominion as domination, a ticket to take advantage of and manipulate all things according to our own will, but that is not the only way Christians view their role by way of the environment.

Another commonality among my participants was the importance of interaction with nature on their environmental ethic. They all live on the outskirts of town or in places where they can access wilderness easily or frequently rather than in the most urban areas. They referred to Jesus' experiences in the wilderness and going to nature for rejuvenation and prayer. A young mother I interviewed clearly depicted this idea saying,

Because I see God as the creator of the earth and everything in it and because I think that I feel closest to God and inspired to worship Him when I'm in nature and very pure environments...that leads me to just have a deep respect and appreciation for the environment.

Clearly, interaction with the natural environment is important to many of my participants in the way they frame Christianity and environmental ethics.

This section has discussed the ways the Christians with environmental ethics that I interviewed have used their frames to understand Christianity in a way that incorporates environmental ethics. In the next section I discuss how they have framed environmental ethics in order to incorporate them into their lives.

Framing Environmental Ethics

When I began this study I fully expected to see variations in the way people thought about and acted out their environmental ethics. I was surprised to see a larger range in variation in defining Christianity than in environmental ethics. Many participants had different terminology, especially when defining or labeling themselves (i.e. environmentalist, conservationist, etc.), but the way they framed their environmental ethics was the same. Here I will outline the ways they act out their environmental ethic.

The environmental ethics emergent in my study can be categorized into six groups: (1) reducing, reusing, and recycling, (2) using alternative transportation, (3) making alternative purchasing decisions, (4) making commitments to careers or education, (5) being kind to the non-human environment, and (6) showing love for God and others. Here I outline the basics of each of these categories. The discussions of these topics were not very quotable. Most participants simply listed off examples.

Reducing, reusing, and recycling are based on the underlying belief that individual actions are important and that each individual contribution is meaningful to the collective whole. Reduction is often manifest in the amount of energy used, especially electrical energy, as well as conserving water, and picking up trash. Reusing is simply using things over and over until they wear out or fall apart instead of using something new every time. Recycling is breaking down the components of something so that it can be made into a new thing. A female participant explained that one way to reduce consumption is to live in small homes and apartments rather than building more large homes and allow those less fortunate to live with us. This also includes having

many family members live in the same house. These actions come down to a willingness to sacrifice one's own personal desires, comforts, and conveniences for the sake of others and the environment.

Using alternative transportation is a way of reducing consumption, but it was brought up specifically as a separate issue among participants. Many referred to mass use of and dependence on petroleum in our society. Some have chosen to drive cars that get better fuel efficiency. They also try to drive as little as possible and use public transportation, walk, or ride a bike when possible. Some will even make decisions on where to live so that they will be close to many of the places they will go on a regular basis.

Making alternative purchasing decisions is also a form of reducing consumption. My participants brought it up specifically because of the many ways it impacts humans and the rest of the earth. Many people purchase organic products, especially foods, which have been produced without the use of pesticides, herbicides, or genetic modification. It can also mean using products that do not contain toxins, especially cleaning supplies. Another environmentally friendly, as well as socially friendly purchasing decision is fair trade items. Fair trade items are made in countries outside the United States in conditions that are good for the workers. The items are then purchased at a fair rate, one that allows the producer to make enough to live on rather than the meager wages provided by many corporate factories that go overseas for their production. Alternative purchases can also be made on landscaping decisions that use less water and vehicles that get more efficient gas mileage. Many people boycott companies that do not meet environmentally and socially beneficial standards in their

production, transportation, and service practices. Many people also choose to purchase locally produced items in order to support the local economy and reduce the amount of pollution due to transportation. The consumer also benefits from the fresh product that does not require as much processing and preservatives.

Some of my participants mentioned they have made larger commitments to environmental ethics. They have become involved with or donate money to organizations with an environmental cause. Others choose to educate people about the effects of their actions on the environment and what they can do to lessen their detrimental impact. A few even say they have chosen their careers based on its capacity to allow them to learn more about and encourage environmental ethics in others. Some have hobbies that are enjoyable and yet use minimal resources and foster a relationship with the natural environment, such as exercising outdoors, fishing, hunting, rock climbing, kayaking, canoeing, camping, playing music, etc.

The practice of being kind to the non-human environment has a very philosophical basis in the biblical teaching that relates directly to stewardship as I discussed earlier. Also related to stewardship is the concept my participants brought up about showing love for God and others, which is based on the Christian teaching to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

So far, in this chapter I have presented the Christian and environmentally ethical backgrounds of the participants in my study. From understanding how Christians with environmental ethics have framed their views could be drawn many ideas for how others might do the same. In the next section I discuss the advice my participants gave

for how Christians and people with environmental ethics can adopt one another's views.

Re-Framing Christianity and Environmental Ethics

Think what we can do if we don't put up this wall that says 'just because it's related to environmentalism or just because it's environmentally conscious we shouldn't do anything'we're putting up a major barrier to God's will when take this...fundamental branch of our lives and deem it as far left, nature worship, and when we refuse to even acknowledge that it's an important part of our life. –male participant

The participants in my study recommended many avenues for overcoming the barriers between Christianity and environmental ethics they perceived. One way to categorize them is to consider who should be the instigators of solutions. Some said actions need to be taken by Christian environmental activists, others thought all Christians needed to do something on one level or another, and others saw the need for a fundamental change in non-Christian environmental activists.

Those participants who argued that Christians with environmental ethics should take action suggested they could: lead a conference on Christianity and environmental ethics marketed to both Christians and non-Christians; discuss these issues with other Christians; act as an example of a sustainable lifestyle; and write letters expressing concerns to Christian organizations as well as government officials.

The participants who argued that all Christians should take action presented three levels from which to approach ways to merge Christianity and environmental ethics. Lay people could talk about these issues in their homes, churches and work places; educate themselves about how to live more sustainably; get together and figure out how to put together a Christian environmental group; organize a non-secular Earth Day festival marketed to both Christians and non-Christians; organize groups within

their own church to encourage sustainable practices in the church building and congregation gatherings; or engage people of all ages in wilderness or gardening experiences. The participants in my study all recognized the schism between Christianity and environmental ethics in American society. For those who brought this up, I asked where they thought it started and how it came to be this way. The most direct answer I got was from a young female participant. She went back to the importance of experience with and connection to the natural world. She said,

I think...because we are separated from nature. And if we were still really relying upon it, which we are for our food, but in other ways, then people would have more respect for it. But we've just found other ways to circumvent it most of the time. And I'm sure that really plays into that attitude that we're able to trust more in our selves and our creation rather than in God's creation.

According to her, the problem is more than just a problem for Christians. It's a problem for everyone in the First World. In order to narrow the gap between Christianity and environmental ethics, persons either need to be more connected to the land in their daily lives or see how they are connected and the effects their actions do have.

Another group my participants suggested could be active in promoting environmental ethics is Christian leaders. In their churches they could incorporate messages about stewardship for creation to present to and encourage in their congregations; they could also put out articles, devotion guides, or lesson guides that include ways to care for all of God's creation. Christian organizations such as denominations or church bodies could incorporate caring for creation into their doctrines, publications, and announcements that are distributed throughout the church; they could encourage their leaders to teach and encourage environmental stewardship;

and use the resources and connections they have as large entities to produce Christian advertising promoting caring for creation. One male participant suggested this is happening in some churches, but could be happening in more. He said,

[Some churches are saying] ‘Wait a second. How did we get this way? We don’t want to be anti-environment’...it’s most clearly in the mainstream...reform type denominations and Presbyterians and those kind of folks because they’re already more willing to...try to understand how changes in society are relevant to them and how they can adapt.

Participants in the “One Way” category of framing Christianity mostly presented the changes that non-Christian environmental activists could make. Many believe non-Christian environmental activists need to have a fundamental change of heart and come to believe in Jesus Christ as their savior. This was because they thought it would change them from having a “worldly” or sinful nature to having a “spiritual” nature. This would not forward environmental ethics, since they already have them. For some Christians with environmental ethics, though, especially those in the “One Way” frame, it is important that people be Christian as well as have environmental ethics. From the manner in which they talked about having a “change of heart” though, it seems they believe there are many people who call themselves Christians who need to have a change of heart as well. From this particular Christian perspective the only way this can happen is by the work of God. So, if non-Christians need to change, they are not the ones who will be bringing about that change. Even as my participants discussed this solution, they still saw Christians as the instigators of change. They believe Christians have to be the ones to reach out to communicate and work with other Christians as well as non-Christians with environmental ethics. A female participant gave a great example of sharing such a message with someone,

I had a...neighbor who...went...to Africa...he was trying to teach them how to farm...what's the first thing he's gonna try to teach them?...that they need to care for the earth. Why? ...they are...the highest part of creation and therefore we have to care for it. You know why your potatoes aren't growing over there? Because the creation requires you to care for it, and here's how you do it. And then going further than that, why should you care for it?... Maybe you want more. In fact, I know you want more because everyone does. And the more that they want can be tied up in sort of unnatural ways by physical things, but what they really want is more life. They want REAL life and that can only be achieved in God...What is it you want? I'll tell you what it is you want and it will give you everything you need.

She described that all over the world people have a common desire for life.

Recognizing the effects of environmental ethics, or lack thereof, world-wide on life will be necessary for Christianity or any faith and environmental ethics to come together.

According to Shaefer (2001),

Crucial for working out a system of ethics from a religious faith perspective is awareness of the plethora of local worldwide ecological problems and the adverse effects on human beings, other species, and biological systems when the natural environment is degraded (pg. 30).

Only when people, regardless of faith, ethic, or practice, recognize the problems in our world and how they are intricately related to those problems will sustainable lifestyles spread. The faith behind it, though, will be a matter of the heart.

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways my participants have framed Christianity and environmental ethics as separate entities, framed Christianity and environmental ethics in the same frame, and their recommendations for other Christians and people with environmental ethics who might try to do the same.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study was based on the observation that previous studies on faith and environmental attitudes and behavior have been lacking because they have used positivistic theories and quantitative methods that have not shown significant relationships between the traditional variables of religiosity and pre-defined environmental attitudes and behaviors. As an alternative approach, I used a critical theory called Framing Theory and the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing to gather information from Christians with environmental ethics. Ultimately, the purpose of my study was to discover what information Christians with environmental ethics could offer that could be used by Christians and people with environmental ethics to communicate and collaborate with one another.

This study presented information about the boundaries associated with Christianity such as political barriers for conservative Christians; boundaries associated with environmental ethics such as Christians who believe in dominating the earth; Christian frames ranging from believing that Christianity is the only way for humans to inherit eternal life to believing Christianity a just something that appeals to some people and not to others; and many environmental practices such as taking care of the non-human environment. Key to this discussion has been the fact that some lay Christians with environmental ethics have framed Christianity and environmental ethics in the same frame which allows them to have a Christian faith while still caring for the earth by agreeing with concepts like being a steward or care taker of all that God has created. This study also discusses how other Christians and people with environmental ethics as lay individuals, leaders, small groups, and large organizations can become educated

about Christianity and environmental ethics, share what they have learned, and act upon it.

The over-riding consensus among my small sample is that Christians rather than people with environmental ethics need to frame issues in ways that appeal to non-Christians with environmental ethics while still remaining true to their own beliefs. They agree that Christians need to change their actions to be more environmentally conscious so that they are more accepted to communicate and work with other Christians and people with environmental ethics. They suggested that Christians with environmental ethics, lay Christians, Christian leaders, and Christian organizations can all take part in educating themselves about environmental ethics, discussing them with others, and coordinating groups to act on what they learn.

I think the in-depth interview approach was more useful than past quantitative survey research on religion and environmental attitudes and behaviors because it my study revealed there is a relationship for some Christians between their faith and environmental ethics. Due to the way some lay Christians frame Christianity and environmental ethics there seem to be various barriers, as I discussed, that could account for the lack of correlation among religious and environmental indicators in other quantitative studies.

Though few Christians may have environmental ethics, some do. Understanding the language people use, the way they frame the world around them, and the barriers surrounding their frames can assist in finding ways to encourage communication and collaboration among various groups of people so that they can encourage the issues they see as important.

The findings from this small study could be used to inform a larger study of Christian laity to achieve saturation of the issue of Christianity and environmental ethics. Also, a similar study could be done with Christian leaders to see whether they have environmental ethics, why or why not, and how environmental ethics could be taught to them or shared among them, as well as ways they could share them with their laity. Since I encountered such a variety of Christian perspectives even in my small study, future research could focus on finding ways to share environmental ethics within a specific denomination or compare and contrast various methods different denominations have used to promote environmental ethics.

This study's most important sociological contribution is to qualitatively understanding how religious and faith-based views are framed. This can allow future quantitative studies to formulate more meaningful survey questions about religion and environmental attitudes and behaviors that could reveal more correlations than past studies.

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

1. How does your faith relate to the way you view the earth?
 - a. Christianity is given a lot of different definitions today. What does it mean to you?
 - b. What do you do or not do because of your environmental ethics?
 - c. What role, if any, does the Bible play in the way you think about and treat the earth?
2. How do you think humans should relate to the earth?
 - a. How is that different, if at all, from the way you see their current relationship?
 - b. Do you think humanity is a part of or separate from nature?
3. Some people think that Christians should not be too concerned about the environment because it's pagan to do so. What do you think about that?
4. What do you believe about God's relationship to nature?
5. What do you believe about Christ's relationship to nature?
6. What would you like other Christians to know about environmental ethics?
7. What would you like other people with environmental ethics to know about Christianity?
8. What do you think gets in the way of Christians and environmental activists communication and working together?
 - a. Do you have any ideas or suggestions about how to get around these barriers?

Note: Other questions were used as probes to gain better understanding while others were omitted if they became irrelevant in the context of the interview.

Appendix 2: Demographic Survey

Please feel free to answer all, any, or none of these questions. The investigator will only use this information for her master's thesis. This form will be collected after the interview so as not to label you beyond any information you have already provided in the interview.

(Please do not write your name or contact information on this form. Thank you.)

What is your denomination, if any? _____

Which of the following do you consider yourself? (Circle all or none that apply.)

Conservative

Evangelical

Fundamentalist

Liberal

Mainline

How long have you been Christian? _____

How long have you had environmental ethics? _____

What is your occupation? _____

What is your sex?

Female

Male

What is your age? _____

Appendix 3: Coding Frame

1. Environmental Actions

Commitments: choice of job, hobbies, support environmental groups, education
 Kind to non-human environment: Don't do physical harm, treat earth like body, recognize web of life
 Stewardship Approach to life
 Purchasing decisions: don't use pesticides, boycotting
 Alternative transportation
 Love God and others: Don't hurt people, preserve for future generations, pray for earth & recognize creator, care for earth shows love for God, hands dirty for others
 Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Pick up trash, less development, live simply, individual efforts important, reduce consumption/energy use, conserve water, need to sacrifice

2. Barriers for Environmentalists

Dominion /fundamentalism
 humans separate
 created over Creator
 Christian Hypocrisy
 sinful nature: pride, selfishness, ignorance, etc.
 Christians imposing beliefs

3. Barriers for Christians

worship trees: care more about earth, animals, plants etc. than people, don't love world
 Messenger Barrier
 focus on other causes
 sinful nature: pride, selfishness, ignorance, etc.
 end of world soon
 disconnected from natural environment
 dependent on finite system
 feel too comfortable
 follow blindly
 chosen people mentality
 Environmentalist Hypocrisy: environmentalists don't know human's importance

4. Overcoming Barriers

organized movement
 Christian Environmental Organizations
 Christianity Teach Environmental Ethic
 organic small group
 change to Spiritual nature
 Christian leadership
 discussing with other Christians
 realize work of Jesus
 friendships
 share experiences in nature

- Christians involved in environmental organizations
- realize creation amazing
- in other countries
- be an example
- hope: Things getting better, good at small stuff
- young people
- use God and scripture as basis
- Christian advertising
- writing letters
- 5. Political influence
 - conservative
 - liberal
 - neutral
 - republican business
 - democrat
 - capitalism/materialism
 - civil rights and govt. as Biblical
 - mainstream Christian acceptance of environmental ethics
- 6. Defines Christianity
 - selflessness, follow Christ's example
 - sinful, forgiven, follower of Christ
 - belief in Christ as God and Man and
 - belief in Christ's sacrifice
 - core teachings same as other faiths
 - belief in Christ as savior
 - others don't need to know about Christianity
 - helping others as Christianity
 - God & Christianity not exclusive
 - Christianity unique message of life
 - how treat earth & relationship with
 - Christ only way to Father
- 7. Christianity and Nature
 - Christianity no influence on Environmental Ethics
 - Christianity Relationship to earth
 - Biblical Influence
 - Duty to care for earth
 - faith central
- 8. Bible and Nature
 - God as Creator: nature as part of God
- 9. Christ and Nature
 - Christ's experience in nature
 - Christ's relationship caring
 - Interprets Dominion: image of dominion as a ruler like Christ

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- Note: All Biblical References come from the New International Version.

Afterward

In any study it is imperative that both the reader and the author recognize their perspectives and biases. I include this afterward in my study not to nullify nor validate the research I have presented, but rather so you, as the reader, can come to your own fair conclusions about the research. There is no study done or paper written that is not in some way influenced by the leanings of the author. The simple (and yet very difficult) act of choosing a topic on which to focus studies, research, and write is in itself a reflection of the values of the researcher. Thus, I present you with this information.

A man and woman from the mid-west raised me in a quaint valley in northern Utah. I have found more and more as I grow older how my upbringing has influenced me in many ways. My mother is the lovely daughter of a staunch German Lutheran couple and my father, an example to me of humility and integrity, the son a Presbyterian couple. My parents met during their college years at Michigan State University in East Lansing. After he graduated with a degree in ecology and she in math, they married and headed out west to Utah where Dad would continue his education to eventually gain a Ph.D. in botany. While Mom remained the Lutheran of her youth, Dad set his sights on more scientific perspectives, acknowledging his discovery that his Christian upbringing was simply that and not a true representation of what was in his heart. My brother is nearly six years my elder and then I came along. I find myself an intriguing concoction of my parents in more ways than one. I gained a strong Christian perspective from the study of scripture and regular church attendance more than encouraged by Mom, while also learning and living a respect for and value

in the natural environment. Dad still held a belief in a Creator over this majestic cosmos and acted out his beliefs by being an avid bike rider, recycler, and community activist and instilling his appreciation for nature and his values in his children. Both parents have always lived what they preached in different yet complementary ways. Since I was surrounded by a dominantly Mormon society that embraced neither my religious beliefs nor did much to embrace my environmental ethic (although I didn't call it that for a long time), I became used to being the outcast. Although I questioned and studied my own beliefs and actions, I often fell into a complacent acceptance that I was just plain different.

When I moved to Missoula, Montana to go to graduate school, I was faced with quite a different culture. I had heard it described as "liberal," "progressive," and "a hippy town." Little did I realize that what all this meant was I could step into a place that strongly embraced my environmental ethic, while the other aspects of my Christian faith would struggle for social support. I had been used to not being agreed with, but it was strange to be accepted for one reason in one circle and another reason in another. For example, working and volunteering on the community farm I could bask in the affirmation of sustainable living while fellow Christians were hard to find. On the flip side of the coin, I attended many strong Christian churches, but rarely found others who would share my respect for and dedication to God's creation, sustaining it, and keeping it pure.

This internal conflict eventually gave birth to many of the questions that guided this study. I consider it a blessing from God that the spiritual warfare that has gone on within and around me has become so intertwined in my pursuit of academic training.

Since I do consider myself a Christian with environmental ethics, I would like to present my own answers to the questions I asked of the participants in my study.

1. How does your faith relate to the way you view the earth?

I believe the earth is God's creation along with everything in it and on it, as well as the whole universe (Ephesians 3:9). God created everything in six days, as we know them now, and He created humans last as the pinnacle-the only being in His image, in which He bestowed a soul (Genesis 1:1-27). He gave humans the great privilege of being stewards, or caretakers who would be deemed members of His family (Genesis 1:28-31 and Ephesians 1:4-6). Along with that privilege, though, came great responsibility, to care for all around us in a selfless and sustainable manner (Luke 12:15 and 16:10 and Isaiah 5:8). This includes humans because Christ stated that we should love one another (Mark 12:28-31). Because God has created such a perfectly holistic and interdependent world, we are dependent on the health of our environment. No matter what damage we cause, however far removed from us it may seem, we cannot know all of its ramifications. We also do not know when the earth will end (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2). The earth is not our own, just as our bodies are not our own, but the temple of the living God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Thus, we should care for both with the love and respect God Himself deserves. However, since the fall, man has been sinful from conception (Psalm 51:5). Thus, we know, despite our efforts, we will always sin against God by directly and indirectly harming others as well as ourselves (1 John 3:8 and 1 Samuel 12:23). Fortunately for us, because of His grace, God has paid for our sin through Jesus' blood and now empowers us to lean on His strength and continue to turn from all the sin that so easily entangle us (Philippians 2:5-11, 1

Corinthians 1:25, and Philippians 4:13). If only we believe this we will live eternally in perfect joy with Him (John 3:16, Romans 6:28).

A. Christianity is given a lot of different definitions today. What does it mean to you?

A Christian is a sinful, but forgiven follower of Christ, a person who believes they are sinful from conception and requires faith in the perfect life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ to live eternally with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect joy because people can do nothing so save themselves from eternal suffering and death. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

B. What do you do or not do because of your environmental ethic?

I try to be educated and aware of the impact of my actions on society and the environment, purchasing organic and local products when possible, purchasing and using environmentally and socially responsible products, driving only when necessary, and talking to people about the importance of these issues. I also think it is very important to interact with God's raw creation on a regular basis. This is because I believe that it is much easier and more effective to care about people and things with which I have an active relationship. I believe many of our social and environmental problems are caused by apathy and ignorance. I especially think ignorance often breeds apathy. Due to my sinful nature (Romans 7:18-19), I know I am prone to wander. It is important for me to be reading the Bible and praying daily so that my relationship with God is strengthened. It is important for me to talk with and interact with loved ones on a regular basis so that our relationships are strengthened. The same goes for the earth. If constantly surrounded by things man-made, it is much easier to become apathetic

about the earth. The way I treat the earth has impacts on people far and wide. It is not very realistic to try to have relationships with all the people who could be negatively affected by my environmentally degrading actions. Thus, if I nurture my relationship with the land, I will be less likely to harm it and therefore to harm others along the way and in the future. It is also very humbling and comforting to interact with God's creation. It humbles me by showing me God's power and creativity. It is comforting because since God has the control to create the universe He can certainly care for all people.

C. What role, if any, does the Bible play in the way you think about and treat the earth?

The Bible puts in written Word all I described before about creation, our relationship to it, God and Christ as I have cited above. See also Psalm 104, Hosea Ch. 2 and 4, Romans Ch. 1, Romans 6:28, Psalm 119:105, 1 Peter 5:7, and Matthew 28. 9.

2. How do you think humans should relate to the earth? How is that different, if at all, from the way you see their current relationship? Do you think humanity is a part of or separate from nature?

Humans should relate to the earth as the stewards God made us to be. (Matthew 20:26-28 and 24:45-51) We should seek to recognize needs separately from wants and injure as little as possible. We should "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly" with God (Micah 6:8). We should allow God to consume us and be our all in all. When we live selflessly and humbly, we will not hoard things or cause harm to others. We need to trust that God will always provide for us, and we do not need to manipulate the earth

to any extent we wish to give us what we need (Luke 12:27-31). We should not trust in our own abilities more than we trust in God and we should always recognize that all good things come from God and give eternal praise to Him in our thoughts, words, and actions (Mark 10:18).

Humanity is a part of nature. God created us along with the rest of creation. However, we are unique and have a specific role within creation. Because we are the only beings with a soul (in the image of God) and with advanced cognitive capabilities we must be good stewards of all God has provided for us. Due to technology, we have the ability to survive in many places on the earth, but this should only be done if it is sustainable (1 Corinthians 10:23-24). God has designed all parts of His creation to interact with and depend on each other for survival. We simply need to follow His perfect natural design (Psalm 104: 14-15).

Humanity's current relationship with nature is not sustainable. However, I believe (world-wide) people are becoming more aware and taking action to live more simply and sustainably. It may take a revolution, but I believe positive change is happening. We can always have hope that God is working in our lives and in the whole world to bring about His glory. Let it not be understood, though, that I believe eternally sustainability can be attained in this life. Until the Lord returns humans will remain sinful and death will continue, thus true sustainability will not be achieved. However, using this fact to free us from the responsibility we have and the strength we have through Christ is cheap grace.

3. Some people think that Christians should not be too concerned about the environment because it's pagan to do so. What do you think about that?

I can see how people have viewed caring for the environmental as nature worship or paganism. However, I believe when we truly care for one another by caring for that on which we depend, we are bringing glory to the Creator of it all. There is a danger of idolizing anything, from an idea to a thing to another person. We should always remember that God is the provider of all, and when we care for or about anything else, we should ultimately recognize and give thanks to Him.

4. What do you believe about God's relationship to nature?

God is the creator of all things, and He is constantly active and working with and in it. It is a testament to His existence, authority, majesty, beauty and love.

5. What do you believe about Christ's relationship to nature?

Christ is God (John 10:30.) He is the Word (John Ch. 1). His hand also formed the earth. Christ teaches us to love one another and also to go into the wilderness to pray, fast, and commune with God. He is also an example to us of selflessness, servant-hood, and humility. When we are selfless we do less harm and more good to others and the rest of creation as well.

6. What would you like other Christians to know about environmental ethics?

I would like other Christians to realize our calling and responsibility to God's creation and act upon that calling along with the calling to share the gospel of Christ with others, seeing these things as one in the same. Stewardship should not be simply of our finances. It should be our way of life. All our actions and their ramifications should be considered in the light of Christ and how they relate to His great commandment to love the Lord our God and our neighbor as our self. One of the most striking things Christians and many others need to realize is when we are harming other

people we are often also harming ourselves. This, too, is contrary to what God would have for us as the holy temples of His Spirit. I would like them to take a serious look for themselves at the word of God disregarding any presuppositions they have and then pray and see how their actions can best serve and love God and others.

7. What would you like other people with environmental ethics to know about Christianity?

If they don't already, I would like people with environmental ethics to see God in and all around them, read His Word, and have a relationship with Him. I pray they will base their faith on God, not on humans, a church, stereotypes, or bad experiences, but on a relationship with the Creator of their souls who loves them so completely and unconditionally that He sacrificed Himself so they could be forgiven and live freely here in this life and eternally with Him in perfect joy.

8. What do you think could be done to overcome any existing barriers between Christians and people with environmental ethics?

I believe Christians who care for God's creation need to live it and share it in every way and with everyone they can just as avidly as they share the gospel. Then they need to trust God to change hearts and lives. I have dreams and aspirations of being an instigator for change in some of the more conservative Christian denominations. Some of the more liberal denominations that are supportive of environmental ethics also support issues I don't, such as abortion rights and homosexuality. I believe the support of these issues is unbiblical. However, I do believe environmental ethics are highly Biblically based and should be encouraged by conservative churches. I have dreams about owning a business that exemplifies environmental sustainability and compassion.

I don't believe that if non-Christians become Christian they will automatically care for God's creation. Clearly that's not the case. But I do think it's important to be a witness to them. Paul was an example of being all things to all people (1 Corinthians 9:20-22). If degrading the environment is not only disrespectful to God and physically harms others but also acts as a barrier to being a light of God's love to others, then it is certainly something that we as Christians need to limit as much as possible.

It is my hope and prayer that this study, which has consumed much of my time and energy, is a service to our Great Creator. I know that all the talents, abilities, opportunities, people, and resources in my life have been gifts from Him and to Him I owe all my thanks and praise. I pray that you as the reader are blessed by Him always and encouraged by His promises of hope and life. Thank you for the time you have given to read this work.